

Who Do You Love?

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John 1:35-42; **LD 35**

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People of God,

The first commandment is “You shall have no other gods before me” and the second is, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them.” The heart of the second commandment is worship. We worship what we love.

You probably know that with most things, after enjoying something new for a while, we start to see what is missing, or what could have been better. The things we thought we wanted might turn out to be less than we hoped for. New stuff is quickly outdated, whether it’s a car or a dress or a new kitchen. New computers and phones are outdated pretty much as soon as you walk out of the store. When we first get the new thing that we really wanted, we might say we love it. But after a while it becomes less exciting or maybe even less enjoyable than we thought it would be. What we think we want doesn’t always turn out to be what we thought it would be. When we exalt our wants too high, they end up bringing disappointment.

As I was looking for a text to consider with this morning’s sermon on the second commandment, I found myself drawn back to the book of John. My last sermon on John was two weeks ago from John 21 where Jesus asks Peter the all-important question, “Do you love me?” Remember that? “Do you love me?” That is the last question in the book. But in our reading today from John 1, we find the first question in the book: “What do you want?” It turns out, as author James Smith put it, those two questions are much the same. “What do you want?” is similar to asking, “What do you love?”

We often love the things we want. Or flipped around, we want the things we love. And it’s possible that we start to worship the things we love. But if we want the wrong things or love the wrong things, we end up being disappointed, don’t we? And—getting to the point of the sermon—when we put our time and energy into things that aren’t worthy of our love, things that stand between us and God, that’s when we end up disillusioned and unfulfilled because we’re worshiping an idol. We confess to worship Jesus alone, but we might actually be worshiping other things alongside of Jesus.

The second commandment is about how we adore the God we profess to love in the first commandment. Do you love God, dear church? Do you want him more than anything else? If that’s the case, then you’ll worship him.

Misdirected Hearts

The concern of the second commandment is our misdirected hearts. Our confused hearts. Our self-deceptive hearts. God gives the Ten Commandments because of our misdirected hearts. He loves us and wants to help steer us right in a world where we can so easily start longing for new things in place of Jesus.

We need to understand that God doesn't give the Ten Commandment because he's worried about himself. He doesn't give them because he wants us to obey or it will look bad on him. No, he knows that he's our good Father and no one loves us more than he does. But our hearts are easily led astray. We fill our lives with things that we think will give meaning or purpose or pleasure. We don't always say it, but our actions often show that we're more focused on things to bring meaning, purpose or pleasure to us than on our Lord Jesus. We commit ourselves to these things more deeply than we ought. In that way, we start to worship such things. These things that we want become what we love and what we therefore worship. That's why the catechism says that the second commandment means,

*That we in no way make any image of God
nor worship him in any other way
than has been commanded in God's Word.*

We worship what we love. We give it priority in our lives. We exalt it to a place where we look to it to do something only God can do. We look to it as we ought to look to the Lord Jesus—to give our lives true meaning, purpose and joy. We might not consciously think we're doing this, but it happens without even noticing it. This is God's concern for us in the Ten Commandments.

When you read the second commandment in Exodus 20, it says that the Lord our God is a jealous God. That's not jealous in the selfish sense. A young girl with a new boyfriend might see him looking at another girl and she gets jealous. A man sees his wife talking to another man and he might get jealous. That's often our insecurity coming through. God is not jealous like that. He's not insecure. God sees us look at another 'god' and he hurts for us. He knows that idol can't do anything for us and will ultimately keep us from him which will then hurt us. That's how he's jealous for us. That's why he says, "Stay away from that! Keep your heart focused on me. I don't want you falling into the traps that your heart runs into and to be hurt by the worship of such false gods."

Our hearts are easily misdirected. We pour ourselves into the fleeting and temporary, instead of the eternal and life-giving. It's not that we are worshiping these things. At least that's what we think. We don't confess that they give us life and purpose. At least that's what we say. But sometimes our actions tell a different story.

For example, we strive to get top grades at school because we want to get the teacher's praise. We are worshiping at the altar of human affection. Yet, when we get the top marks, we still feel unfulfilled. We want more. No matter how much we pour our heart into it, that kind of worship robs us, leaving us empty or hungrier than ever.

We strive to get to the top of the corporate ladder because we want the fancy office and the big paycheck. We might be bowing to the money idol. But when we reach the top and get the office and the six-figure salary, we still feel empty inside. When our bank account hits the magic million-dollar mark, we are still not satisfied. We might even be disappointed. The very thing we wanted, the thing we love and pursued isn't what we imagined it would be. We end up being robbed instead of truly enriched.

A lot of people today obsess about their body. We worship the ideal body, which is lean and mean or trim and tight. We go the gym and workout to get that body. We obsess about our diet to feed the machine. And, of course, there is nothing wrong with taking care of your body. That's a good thing. But for some people, they begin to worship the perfect body. And then it can happen that you are never satisfied with it. Our focus for living is our body, which has become an idol, instead of worshiping the Lord. Then rather than being healthy, we become anorexic or something like that, or we take so much of our time to build up our body that it becomes the number one focus of our lives. We worship at the altar of our body even while confessing to worship Christ alone.

Friends, we suffer from misdirected hearts. We are so immersed in our culture that we hardly notice that we're worshiping the false gods that are all around us.

Worship to Redirect our Hearts

That's why the point of the second commandment is to redirect our hearts. God loves you and me. He hates it that we get led astray from him because it hurts us. It robs us of the joy, the focus, the purpose, and the meaning of life when our hearts are not set on worshiping him alone. We live distracted lives. So worshiping God points us in the right direction.

Many people think that worship is optional for the Christian. It's not. It's essential. In the first commandment, God tells us that he's to be number one in our lives. Then in the second he tells us how to keep him in first place. Worship! We need worship to get our focus off of the distractions of the idols we are submersed in in our society and in our own hearts. Worship calls us back to God. We can pray in worship like the word of The Book of Common Prayer that say, *"Almighty Father, we have erred and strayed like lost sheep, followed the devises of our own hearts."* True worship is an important part of keeping our focus on Jesus.

Let me take you, for example, to a place where God is the perfect focus of everyone's life. Look at Revelation 4:8-11. We pray here on earth for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Well, here's an example of the worship of God by the living creatures in heaven.

Rev 4:8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come."*

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

*¹¹ "You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created*

and have their being.”

In heaven where these living creatures and the 24 elders dwell, there are no distractions, no idols to worship, nothing to detract from God in his pure glory and holiness. Yet, they are still wholeheartedly worshipping God. God is all they want. He's who they love.

I'm not suggesting that "coming to church", as we say, is all we need to do. Our soul needs worship. We are spiritual beings who are worshipers. If we don't worship the Lord, we worship something else. Bruce Springsteen sang, "Everybody's got a hungry heart," and that's a spiritual truth. We have a soul that longs to connect with God. And when we don't want to acknowledge the one true God, we worship idols. Even as Christians, we can fall into trying to worship God through idols, kind of like Aaron and people of Israel did when they set up a Golden Calf. They had their focus on the wrong thing. God cannot be worshiped through idols. Yet our society tells us that as long as you are sincere in what you believe, all paths lead to God. All worship is equal. The catechism reminds us,

God can not and may not
be visibly portrayed in any way.
Although creatures may be portrayed,
yet God forbids making or having such images
if one's intention is to worship them
or to serve God through them.

Idol worship is not God's way for us. We need to worship him alone.

But coming to church for Sunday worship is not the only answer to breaking our hearts of the inclination to worship idols. Moms and dads, bringing your kids to church on Sunday is a good thing to do as we teach kids routines and practices that can lead us to God. And in worship we can truly encounter God. But that's only one part of it. I say this because I read an article in which the writer tried to insist that NOT taking our kids to church was setting them up for failure. And by failure he meant spiritual failure. While I appreciate what he's trying to say, I think it's simplistic and wrong.

We human beings, especially as spiritual beings, often look for simple ways that will give us a guaranteed outcome. If you take your kids to church every week, they will become Christians. I think you could talk to almost any family here whose children have now grown up and discover that that formula is not a guarantee. I would say that it's a very good practice. A biblically mandated practice. But it's not a guarantee. If it was, every child that ever grew up going to church would now be walking with Jesus faithfully and still attending church. That isn't the case.

What our children need—what we all need—is to know Jesus. We all need to encounter Jesus in this life. I grew up going to church twice every Sunday. Going to church was mostly boring for me as a kid. But it built on a foundation that was modelled at home. I saw my parents living for Jesus. I saw them delighting in him, happily sharing the gospel with us as kids and with others. Most importantly, for me at least, I saw them depending on Jesus, no matter what they were going through. That set me on a path to seek Jesus myself. And as I grew older, I found

Jesus to be my own Saviour, my own friend, an ever present help. All of us need to know and love Jesus as the focus of our worship. He must be our greatest want and our first love.

Corporate worship is very important. But it is only one part of what makes us worshipers of God. That's because worship doesn't only happen in here—in church buildings. It doesn't only happen on Sundays or when God's people gather in large groups. It happens in our homes. It happens around our kitchen tables or in our family room. It happens in our quiet place in the morning or evening. It happens when we bow our head in prayer at lunch time. It happens when you work or play and offer your service as a pleasing sacrifice to God—giving him our best efforts. Worship is about ascribing God worth. It is acknowledging God as our Saviour and Lord. It is humbling ourselves before him and recognizing that we are completely dependent on him for everything. It reorients us from self to God.

It's much more than church services in here. But we rehearse life here in worship on Sundays. We reorient our lives after living in the confused world all week.

All of the parts of the Order of Worship are intended to help us reorient our lives to putting God first and keeping him there. Worship is often called a dialogue between God and his people. We are called out of the world and called into worship by God. He welcomes us with a holy greeting. We lift our hearts up to him in song, to ascribe worth and praise to him. We confess our sins to him in prayer. We hear his words of forgiveness and pardon and his call back to the serving him in the trenches of our lives. We listen to the Bible and a sermon to help us gain new insight, courage or direction for offering our whole lives as an act of worship to God. We offer prayers to God to praise him, to make our humble requests to him and to let him know that we want the whole world to rest in his great salvation and to live under his rule and by his Word. In prayer we remember that God's desire is for the world to take the shape of heaven's kingdom, will and glory—for our lives to model those of the living creatures and 24 elders in Revelation 4.

We also give our money in worship. In doing so, we remind ourselves that God has given us everything. Our world thinks we have to take care of ourselves. God says, "I'll take care of you because everything is mine." So we give back to him what he's already given to us. And we do that to reorient ourselves away from self-preservation and back to greater trust in God. In giving we say, "Thank you Lord for everything I have. It's all from you! Now I acknowledge you as the giver of every good gift by giving money back to the holy work of your kingdom."

At the end, we leave worship knowing that God promises to go with us—to bless us and make us a blessing in our world. So in this hour or two of worship we reorient ourselves away from self-centred living, from wanting the wrong things and loving the wrong things. We orient ourselves back to living for God's glory and honour each moment of each day.

Only in corporate worship do we celebrate the sacraments. These are holy signs and seals of God's promises by which he fills our lives with grace. Along with

the preaching of the word, sacraments are called means of grace. These are God's gifts to help us grow stronger in our faith and keep him first.

So, it's good and important that we bring our children to public worship. But even more important is living a God-centred, worship-filled life for your children to observe each and every day. Do our children see in our daily lives that we are living for Jesus? Or do they see us striving constantly for the things of this world that we want and love? Likewise, what do our neighbours see us striving for? How about our co-workers and teammates or classmates? Is Jesus number one in our lives? Do we love him above all else? I'm sure we all wish we could say yes with 100% certainty. But we can't.

That's why the Lord calls us to worship. It's his gift to us to get our heart back to where it belongs: loving him above all else!

Congregation, spiritual maturity is knowing that we are prone to wander. Knowing our sinful heart is pulling away from God. That's how much we need Jesus. If it weren't for him, we would be lost on that wayward path. But his grace comes to us, his resurrection power, his Holy Spirit changes the direction of our heart so that we want to give God alone our worship. We praise Jesus because he is the one who ultimately changes our heart. And when he changes our heart, we start to want what he wants and love what he loves. To him be the glory and praise.